



THE SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL STATE OF ENGLAND,
COMPARED WITH ITS MORAL CONDITION.

A SERMON

DELIVERED IN

St. John's Catholic Church,

SALFORD,

ON SUNDAY, JULY 28TH, 1850.

BY

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SERMON.

LUKE XVIII., 13.

“AMEN, I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT THIS MAN WENT DOWN TO HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED, RATHER THAN THE OTHER.”

Besides the direct and severe application of them made by our blessed Redeemer Himself, these words are naturally suggestive to us of many other purposes, tending particularly to repress all prideful thoughts, when we are inclined to judge ourselves by comparison with others. And this is the case, not merely when we are pleased to contrast ourselves as individuals with individuals; but also when this comparison is made by classes or states of men, as if the rich should compare themselves with the poor, or the poor with the rich, or nation with nation, or age with age. And, my brethren, if there be any one danger that more especially belongs to the time and to the country in which we live, it lies in this; that we see ourselves so surrounded by whatever may seem to indicate a superior development of social and intellectual qualities; we have gathered around us in such an eminent degree whatever, in the ordinary estimation of men, can raise one class above another, in all that relates to the ornaments, to the pursuits, and to the success of life,—that we are not a little disposed to look down with some contempt upon those who have gone before us, or who live at a distance from us, and to exalt ourselves in our own thoughts, as though we had gained thereby some true, some solid and lasting advantage.

And yet, my brethren, the parable in the Gospel of

this Sunday, should well undeceive us of such thoughts; for it is not necessary that we should suppose that Pharisee of whom our Saviour speaks, to have uttered untruth, when he enumerated his own good gifts. We need not assume that he did not fast and pray, and give alms, and strictly obey the law. Neither is it necessary that we should imagine him to have been hiddenly all this time wicked or vicious. Nay, we may even go so much further in admitting the truth of all he says, as to believe that the publican, with whom he contrasted himself, was all up to that moment that he described; and yet it is plain that in the judgment, in the estimate, of God, it was possible that all those great and truly solid virtues, might be more than fully counterbalanced on the other side, by the possession of one unseen and unnoticed gift,—that of humble and secret consciousness of unworthiness. And so, likewise, was it in the history of ancient nations. Who doubts not, that if a keen observer had traversed the earth, and had visited Egypt in its precocious civilisation, erecting already monuments which were to last till the end of time,—or gaining the regions of the East, had found already there schools of philosophy pondering over the deepest mysteries of nature, he would have pronounced that those were the great and noble people of the earth; and would have passed unheeded by Israel, still dwelling in tents in the desert, and yet but a nomade and shepherd people, before it had erected a temple to its God. And yet would not this judgment have been ratified by Him, who said that Israel was by Him chosen, and that He had rejected all the great and glorious nations of the earth? because one unnoticed gift—that of true faith and knowledge—was far more

in the sight of God than those which ennobled and exalted, and made prosperous, the great nations of the earth.

Then it becomes us, my dear brethren, to correct our too-easily excited pride, by thoughts such as these. Yet it is not my intention so much to compare what is dazzling, or even what is truly great in this nation, with what may be passing among other people. But it is rather my desire to examine how far what has been given us, how far what has been done for us, has been responded to, by the compliance with those duties which the wonderful dealings of Providence with us, must naturally have imposed upon us. It is right that we should see, whether or no we have discharged the debt which we owe, to that God from whom alone comes all this greatness.

There is no doubt, my brethren, that never in the history of nations, was any people advanced beyond ours, at the present time, in all that constitutes social and intellectual greatness. There is no part of the world, however distant, which has not been made to yield its produce for our service. There is no point of heaven, of earth, or of sea, which has not been curiously scanned, and every peculiarity of it profitably investigated. There is no substance in creation that has not been made subservient to the use of man, and he has acquired a dominion over the whole of material existence, which makes him know how to turn to his profit whatever any, even the most mysterious, element has produced. And not content with this; not content with having reduced the more palpable and grosser substances of existence into his servitude, he has claimed for, in his dominion, even the more subtle and mysterious agencies of existence; and heat, and light, and fire, and electricity, all

serve his ends. And, as if even these should not suffice, time, space, that which was but imaginary in calculation, but which is real in the purposes of life, have brought their laws to his feet, and submitted themselves to his guidance. And what is the natural result of this? Why, that we are inclined to look back upon the ages that have preceded us, as though they were but so many years in the infancy and youth of mankind, which has now for the first time developed itself in all the strength of manhood. We stretch forth our arm, as though *it* had been powerful to do these things; and we raise our heads, as though in them were the seat of that intelligence which has brought about this mighty result. And we are too apt to forget our duties, and that we are but dust and ashes. For it cannot be denied that, with all this wonderful expansion of whatever is physically and socially and intellectually great in man, there must likewise have arisen a corresponding sphere of duty, and of duty commensurate with all this, and worthy of man, as he believes himself to be so much greater than ever he was before. Now this is the inquiry for us to make.—Have we learned these duties, and have we discharged them? And perhaps the first question which I ask, in reference to this inquiry, may move some to a smile of wonder, almost of pity, that such a question could be asked in what is called the enlightened 19th century. But I ask it still, and I ask it the more boldly here, in this city, whereof it may be said; that it is the very centre of that restless activity of the human mind, which is subjugating nature on every side to the service of its wishes,—and I ask you as I would ask myself, and as every conscience ought to ask, “Are we recording as we ought to do, our gratitude to

God for all this? Are we writing upon imperishable monuments, which shall last—if it be in God's judgments that this should happen—even after the decay of our great social fabric; to remind men of that Being by whom such wonderful things have been accomplished:—that from Him, from God alone, came all these gifts; and that it was recognised, by the present generation, as a wonderful dealing of His Providence with them that they were led to the height which they attained? For, my brethren, I hesitate not to say, that there has been no nation upon this earth, from the savage in his wildness, to the heathen in his magnificence, and then to the Christian in his calmer power,—which has not felt that its seasons of national grandeur, demanded from it national records of commensurate grandeur, beauty, and durability;—so that even if they, like others, should perish, at least there should survive those records of their gratitude, inscribed on indelible monuments that should hand down this principle to a weaker posterity;—that in proportion to the greatness of the human soul in its expansion, in proportion to the greatness of human power in its magnificence, should be the extent of gratitude for these gifts given; and that these gifts should themselves be publicly acknowledged, to those who may not afterward be able to imitate their works, as being the very fruits of those extraordinary blessings. Yes, my brethren, I believe that in no other period of the world, will there have been so slight, so miserable a proportion between what is done directly to record gratitude to God, and the gifts that He has bestowed, as in the present day. The first gold that came from the mines of Peru shines as yet brightly upon the fretted roofs of a beautiful church, espe-

cially intended to commemorate the first great mysteries of the christian dispensation—the incarnation and birth of our Lord.* The first gold that came from California—what has become of *that*? Perhaps it was spent in a first debauch, in thanksgiving for the wonderful discovery. I know it is not the taste of the age ; it is not its idea ; and, as I said before, it may even be met by some with a smile, when uttered, that a nation should record directly, by acts performed for God, its gratitude towards Him. Yes, it would not be the first time that this has been so. There has gone before this a nation, a people, small indeed in number compared with ours, but in so many respects resembling it, that we need not be ashamed to look upon it as a model, and a bright example,—a nation whose ships, both for war and for commerce, visited the distant ends of the then known world, which planted its colonies on remote continents and islands, and on hostile coasts, which exercised an influence over the commerce of the whole earth, and even gave its regulations and phraseology to this very country. That nation, which, planted on the edge of the Adriatic, raised the wonderful city of Venice, that still astonishes the traveller in the very centre of the sea,—that great, that truly noble, and yet industrious and mercantile nation, owes its great glory now to its having so well learned the duty of interweaving the arts of commerce and of industry, with those of taste and feeling ; and of laying down the wreath, thus made, before the altar of God, where to this day it remains. In the very midst of that wonderful city rises a sumptuous church, the very form of which tells you that it was erected by a merchant nation, by a nation

* Santa Maria Maggiore, in Rome.

that had access to models of beauty of ancient times, that had remained in the hands of strangers, and beyond the reach of travellers. And not only year after year, but age after age did it continue to be piled up with magnificent gifts, commensurate ever with the greatness and prosperity, civil and commercial, of the republic. There, to this day, that church remains, surrounded, even in its very exterior, with the most precious produce of every distant land. There columns, which the ancient Roman only thought of placing in his inmost sanctuary, so great was their beauty and their value, form but an outward ornament to that temple, the interior of which is enriched by every imaginable art. There, tables of gold, from the distant east, are seen covered and encrusted with pearls, and the choicest gems of every, till then, unexplored coast. What were all these? They were so many records, each of a prosperous voyage of fleet or of galley. The merchant sent his ship forth, in those days, with injunctions to its commander, that whatever could be procured, costly in art or in nature, in gem, in marble, or in metal, should be purchased and brought home as an offering to the church of St. Mark. And while the city has been comparatively perishing around it—perishing to an extent which the wisest eyes of its prosperous days could not have foreseen; for at length the palaces of its Doges have become the hotels of modern travellers from the north; and the noiseless gliding of the gondola is disturbed in those still waters, by the rush of the engine, whose iron track connects it with the mainland; there, it had been wisely foreseen, would be an unfailing record, to whoever might come after them, that Venice knew how to become a great mercantile nation, and at the

same time remain pious to its God, and make subservient to His worship, and to the recording of His goodness, that wonderful pre-eminence which He had given to it in the dominion over earth's treasures.

And, my brethren, do you think that this is unworthy of a great nation, or that rather there is not in it a feeling which humanity itself must honour and dictate? And yet, may we not say, that should the time at length come, when, according to the laws of every human empire, decline shall here succeed to prosperity, when a weaker people come after us and wonder at our greatness, displayed in the monuments left behind us, for mere human purposes, it will strike them with astonishment that, different from every other race, we should have done nothing for religion, nothing for the worship of God, that will bear a remote comparison with what has been done by others far less blessed, far less prosperous, far less powerful, in all that can command the elements of this world?

Then too if God has given us this great intellectual superiority, of which we so much boast; if He has bestowed upon the spirit of this nation and this age such keen powers of perception, such accurate modes of reasoning, such certainty of arriving at conclusions of a practical and real nature;—surely it would be but right and natural to expect, that these same intellectual gifts should have been applied with equal earnestness, and equal success, to the investigation of the highest and sublimest truth. Now, what would necessarily be the result, were this the case? Do we want a proof that these powers are not so employed? Why, you will find it yourselves, in merely considering what is every day before your own eyes. You see how a multitude of men, equally eager in pursuit of the

same object, equally interested in arriving at it by the shortest and simplest modes, feeling that upon this depends their success in the great purpose which they propose to themselves in life,—contrive infallibly to arrive at the same conclusions, to practise the same methods, to understand alike the same application of powers. Do you not see that in your commerce, and in your manufactures, in which not a few, but hundreds and thousands bend the whole of their intelligence towards the same purposes, all find it necessary to employ the same mode of proceeding;—that there is, in other words, unity in regard to the operations of industry and commerce; that though one may have some small peculiar advantage over another, yet it would be impossible that any duly interested in the pursuit, should long lag behind the rest, or go upon a different track,—as impossible as it would be to imagine, that one individual navigator sailing to a distant part of the world, would go round double the length of the track which every body else pursues. And whence comes this? And whence comes it, likewise, that in every other pursuit where intelligence is concerned, men come to the same results? How is it, if hundreds of astronomers, from various parts of the earth, contemplate the heavens, all discover the same clusters of stars, and all form for themselves the same planispheres? It is because without prejudice, but with simple love of truth, they bend the whole of the energies and powers which God had given them, to the discovery of that which they know to be right and true. And as certain as it is that the gift comes from One unto all, so certain is it that it will return to Him in the discovery of that truth. Then why is it, that in all that concerns the affairs of life, this unity of aim and of attainment should be secure;

yet, that in all that concerns religion, it should not be even dreamt, that the world's method of pursuing and of discovering truth is available; that there should be an absence even of the feeling, that it was right and necessary in any way to direct the intellect to the pursuit of truth, and with that absence of prejudice or of pre-judgment, which would be sure to step between it and its object? And can this, my brethren, be compatible with the acknowledgment, that God has given us a greater power, a greater intellectual keenness, than has been given to others? Or does it not show that we have turned our backs upon the Giver, and have imagined that, if God has made us intelligent, if God has sharpened our reason and our faculties, it is only that we might become richer in this world, that we might live the more in luxury, that we might raise our families to distinction; but that He never intended those good gifts to be for one moment turned towards Him, or to the investigation of anything which He has taught us? For, my brethren, as sure as the results have been in other respects, so sure must they be in this,—that if the same faculties be directed in the same manner, towards the discovery of truth, truth in its unity will necessarily be equally found; because the processes, the means, are equally certain and equally definite. Now I say not what that conclusion would be; but I leave it to all that hear me, to judge and pronounce for themselves; and I am quite sure, that though there may be some who would dispute my premises; though there may be some who would be inclined not to admit that it was the duty of man to give as much attention to religious truth as to worldly prosperity, (for there may be some who would go thus far),

there is no one who doubts, that, were it possible for all men to turn their thoughts to religious investigation, as the means of attaining unity of belief,—there is no chance whatever of such a result, except by all coming, in some way that to them may appear inexplicable, to the acknowledgment of some first principles in religion which, of their own nature, secure to all holding them unity of belief. Therefore, as I am not reasoning on religious unity now, I only put it before you, who are intelligent, sharp-sighted men, and at the same time, I will hope, highly sensible of your debt of gratitude to God; since He has given these gifts to the reasoning and mental powers of the men of our day, whether it is not reasonable to expect that a proportion of their application at least should be directed to this great purpose. And if so, I put it to you again, whether the truth will not be found where there is unity, and where the same processes are already found to lead to the same results?

But after all, it will be said that it is not in these ways that the true greatness of our nation is to be discovered;—that it is rather to be looked for in the moral improvement, which the social and intellectual powers of the age are causing in every class of society. Civilization is diffused; men of every grade are more intelligent, more open to information, are better capable of receiving great truths, than ever they were before; and this is the proof, the real proof, that we are advancing both in moral and intellectual, greatness. I wish, my brethren, that I could agree in this. Great indeed are the things that have been done for the diffusion of knowledge, and in part, certainly, of that knowledge, which by teaching men to rule and to direct their minds,

makes them likewise better members of society, and in this respect moralises them greatly. Education has been carried to a perfection unknown before, both in regard to its extent and in regard to its accuracy. But are we convinced that the real moral tone of society, in every part, is on the increase? Is it not notorious that crimes, and crimes even that were unknown amongst us a few years ago,—that deeds of violence, which not even the hot passionate blood of the South is here to palliate,—that such crimes as these are increasing in the great masses of our population? Is it not well known that the relations of the family are sadly violated, and that multitudes live without a consciousness of their sacred nature? Are we improving the people in regard to these things? Are we doing anything to convince them more thoroughly, and upon true church grounds, of their great duties to God, to society, to their families, and to themselves? I fear we must answer, no; and I will say boldly, that there are reasons why it should be so; there are immense obstacles, in the religious institutions of this country, to this being possible; because it is not in their power to come home to the feelings, to the affections of the poor; they raise not up any who devote themselves to them, who sacrifice themselves for their benefit; who find a higher reward than man can give in making themselves servants of the servants of God. And what is the visible result of this? That any great institutions which make us think that we are acting so powerfully upon the masses of the population, reach not to the very depths of the miseries which have to be probed, and which have to be healed. We are content with raising the position of the artizan; with mak-

ing him more intelligent; with providing him with the means of education; with instructing him in his leisure hours to store his mind with knowledge. All this is good; and yet even the institutions that work upon that class have not, of their own nature, a direct moral tendency. They increase self-reliance, self-confidence; they accustom men to find a law for and within themselves; they tell them not of any essential link that there is, between what is taught them and the duty which they owe to God; they teach them not modesty, they teach them not obedience, they teach them not purity of thought and action, they teach them not that—I will not say benevolence or philanthropy, (for these are taught),—but that charity which is according to the Gospel, that love, not of friend only, but of enemy, that contentment with their state in society, which makes them only ambitious to earn God's reward for the discharge of their own duties. None of these things are taught; and there are no institutions by which they can be taught, so as to counteract the opposite tendency, of much that is every day borne to their ears. And as to the poor, the really poor, those who are starving in the midst of disease, and penury, and neglect, and abandonment,—who thinks of them? They are considered as a class beneath you; and if something is done for the education of their children, there indeed it ends. But as to any attempt to moralise those stagnant masses, which, like the marsh under the foundation of the building, are sure in the end to sap and rot it, and bring it down with a fearful ruin,—for that class, oh! because there is no glory to be gained, no honour before the world, for mingling with them, or relieving them,—for that class we are doing little or nothing

in this age. Society wishes to overlook them; and, as in our proud metropolis we seek to drive them from the thoroughfares and streets through which fashion passes, and so pack them still closer together in hidden corners, where the corruption will fester more sorely; so likewise in our state we seem to forget ancient Rome, which could teach us so much,—for, like it, we give no heed to the proletarianism which is ready, when the hour comes, to take in hand the torch of destruction, ever ready to be lighted, and to kindle the flames that finally consume a deranged and sinking society. Oh, we are in danger of being satisfied with the smooth and shining surfaces of things; and while we can erect around us records of our own greatness, which may last our time, and make us, as in a glass, only view our own period, we are forgetting the really great interests of a nation which God has made great; because we are not making it great before Him and for Him; because we are not gladly taking advantage of the gifts which He has bestowed upon us, for the purpose of doing something for Him. And if I before compared what we are doing with what was done in that great and noble, though small, republic of Venice; if I showed you how indelible was the record, and how splendid the monument of its commercial greatness, which it raised, and which will stand probably to the world's end, shall I tell you to what I would liken the prosperity, the glory, and the glittering splendour of a nation which is content with the passing show of its own magnificence? I know no comparison that will better describe it than what I have more than once witnessed, and what he who witnesses it will not easily forget. Some of you, perhaps, may have seen, as well as myself, some great day of festival in a foreign

city, when at evening the public place is hung with garlands and festooned with brilliant lamps, and all is bright and gaudy; and every old edifice is brought out in fresh and dazzling grandeur, and everything that is new and gaudy looks rich and noble. There is the thrilling music which rings in triumph against those ancient walls; there are the splendid equipages, bearing about the fairest and noblest of the land; there the crowds of exulting citizens, in holiday attire, who make the air ring with the joys or the triumphs of the day. But pass by there a few hours afterwards, and you will see, first, the silent place, with one or two thoughtful men, like yourself, passing to and fro, and meditating on the contrast. The greater portion of the lamps are extinguished; the few that remain are blinking with a doubtful light, and just expiring; the garlands are wavering to and fro with a mournful murmur in the morning breeze; all looks dismal, bleak, and desolate: and the silence that has succeeded to the noise of riotous pleasure, and the tarnished and fading aspect of all around, make one turn away with a sinking heart, and with a melancholy mind, and say, "Thus must pass away in a few hours, and leave such miserable records as these of past beauty and joy, whatever is merely of earth, whatever is designed by man for his own little glory."

Oh, my brethren, pause while you are yet in the day of your greatness, in the day of blessings, before that arrives, of severe, though friendly visitation from God. I should love to think that, if ever that day should come, if ever the vast commerce and industry of this city, long even after you have been gathered to your fathers, should have flowed into other chan-

nels, and planted itself on other points of earth, that when many, perhaps, of these great structures that indicate your present greatness, may have fallen into ruins, there shall stand, for instance, a church, humble even as this is, but richly adorned, covered with the gifts of those whom God has prospered, to say, "See what the men of that age have done ! They knew how to leave an unperishing monument of their gratitude to God for the blessings which He bestowed upon them. Look what, in the day of their greatness, social and intellectual, they did in charity for the poorest of the poor of their city. For even though a great many of them did not agree with the doctrine taught in that place, even though some had grown up with embittered feelings and strong prejudices against the religion here practised, they rose, in the greatness of their minds, above all these unkind feelings ; and when they saw that in their city there was a vast multitude of the poorest, who worshipped the God of their fathers as their fathers had done before them ; when they considered how those poor ones were the ministers to their wealth and aggrandisement, that it was by the sweat of their brows that their own children came to live in greatness and peace, they felt it a duty that pressed upon them, to make the charity of their great city commensurate to all its wants. And so they who taxed the bodies of others, with whom Providence had not dealt so bountifully as with themselves, instead of taxing their souls likewise, blessed and enriched them. For when it was told them that these their poor neighbours had struggled hard, to honour God by erecting in His honour a temple which was an honour to their city, and, without exception, the noblest monument erected during those days of prosperity, equal

in its beauty and magnificence to the estimate which the world has made of their wealth; and when they learnt that still it remained weighed down with debt and embarrassment, and still requiring large aid for its completion, they nobly and generously came forward to rescue them, and soon relieved them from all pressing difficulty. And thus did St. John's Church become the imperishable monument of that generation's gratitude to Heaven for its great temporal blessings. And hence it comes, that now amidst the want of those ample riches which before adorned the city, there stands still that noble temple, as a proof that God was not forgotten in prosperity, and even when the interests of the world were not neglected."

But I will not augur future evil. No, my brethren, I believe that the truest and surest type of a great and prosperous nation will be the union of two symbols which are here: on the one side those vast and darkened piles of building, which fill your city, with their tall columns, above which the banner of industry ever streams in the wind; and, on the other, the vast magnificent church of God, with its spire bearing the symbol of peace and salvation; the two together, great in their respective magnificence—the factories, huge, and giving life to thousands within them; and the church, ample and great to receive them, when they come thenceforth, to pray for those who are their benefactors on earth, and to implore prosperity upon their hospitable abode. Oh, these two, side by side, would constitute what the world has never before seen,—true earthly greatness, united with equal grandeur of religious thought and feeling, and an amplitude of charity commensurate with wealth. To

the exercise, then, of this duty, I invite you this day, and I call upon you to show the feelings which you entertain, to be worthy of what God has done for you; your feeling first of gratitude to Him for having given you ample abundance of the goods of this world; your recognition of Him as the Author and Giver of your great intellectual, social, and commercial prosperity; your charity, particularly for the poorest classes, whose eternal interests are so much neglected. All these considerations will, —I trust, induce you this day, to contribute largely and generously towards the purpose proposed to you; and that is, to assist this noble but as yet unfinished pile, to grow up into what may be worthy of you; that so the poor may be able to be instructed in those duties, and trained to practise those virtues, which fit them for happiness in time and in eternity. And thus will blessing go from one edifice to another; the Church here shall send forth its benedictions upon the work of your hands, and the exercise of those powers which God has given you; and the religious state of this city will bear testimony that what is great according to this world, may likewise be made great before God, and may lead men towards Him.

